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ABSTRACT

Under development in a Maryland district, the Competency-Based Systems Oriented Guidance Program described here combines (1) a focus on helping all students become competent in knowledge, attitude, and skills and (2) a systems orientation addressing the entire spectrum of student life by providing a common language, methods of information exchange, and encouragement to make long range personal and vocational plans. Following a background review, a figure representing the program as a wheel is explicated. Elements of the program (discussed and exemplified by additional charts) include the guidance philosophy, a conceptual model of guidance, district and school guidance goals, and student competencies. Additional components of the wheel include a glossary, management systems, counselor agreements, needs data, individual school and counselor plans, student monitoring, an advisory council, and a master calendar of events. Other figures appended include the table of contents and a subheading contents page from a district guidance handbook. It is concluded that advantages of the program include built-in evaluation at various levels, flexible scope, adaptability to changed system needs, accountability, and facilitation of a new attitude toward guidance as an integral part of the academic program. (MJL)

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HOW TO DEVELOP A BETTER GUIDANCE PROGRAM

John C. Murphy, Chairman
Board of Education of Howard County, Maryland

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April 23-26, 1983

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HOW TO DEVELOP A BETTER GUIDANCE PROGRAM

John C. Murphy, Chairman
Board of Education of Howard County, Maryland

This paper describes the Competency-Based Systems Oriented Guidance Program under development in the public schools of Howard County, Maryland since 1980. The phrases, "Competency-Based" and "Systems Oriented" are key elements in the present program which make it significantly different in focus and in method from the guidance system in use in Howard County prior to 1980. Full implementation of the new system will require another two years; therefore, my presentation today should be viewed as a status report.

The objectives of the guidance program include an evaluation component intended to answer the question "How are students different because of the existence of the guidance program?" This implies a long-term longitudinal evaluation component which will last some years beyond the initial implementation phase for full assessment of the effectiveness of the program. The general response on the part of counselors, other school professionals, parents, and students toward the program as it now exists has been quite favorable.

BACKGROUND

Howard County, Maryland is a single district of approximately 25,000 students organized in twenty-five K-5 elementary schools, eleven 6-8 middle schools and eight 9-12 high schools. The county is located midway between Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D. C. It contains the new town of Columbia, which has been a focus for the rapid transition of the county from a rural to an urban community with a strong professional/technical flavor. More than 75% of high school graduates now seek further education. In addition, there is a substantial (20%) black and asian population, most of whom have a professional background and high educational expectations.

In response to these demographic changes, the county school system grew rapidly in size and in the scope and quality of its curriculum offerings during the latter part of the 1970's. Guidance was an exception; and by 1978 it had become clear to the Board of Education and the County Superintendent that change was necessary. Some of the problems may be ones which you have experienced in your district as well. Guidance counselors were faced with a high student load, typically between 300 and 400 students per counselor. They were saturated with paperwork and had difficulty in assigning priorities among academic, career, and personal guidance. Students represented by student government and other specifically identified student organizations saw guidance as a lottery system where the quality and type of information depended largely on the ability of the individual counselor assigned to them. For parents, there was a widely-held belief that the level of career and personal advice available to students was inadequate; that it was not available equitably to all students; and that there was little direct involvement available to parents for access to the general guidance process.

A fresh start in the guidance area was made in 1979 with new leadership in the program and a charge to conduct a critical review of students' needs. The stated objective of the review was to develop a coordinated guidance program focused on students' needs with a flexible structure which could adapt to demographic changes and changing students' needs. It was important that this program be administratively flexible and able to utilize the limited guidance resources in an efficient manner. Because of fiscal limitations, one key question was, "Is it possible to multiply the availability of guidance services to students without committing significantly more resources to the program and incurring significantly higher costs?" The program which I will describe is the result of that review. It is largely the work of Mrs. Sharon Johnson, Director of Pupil Services for the Howard County Public School System, and other members of the guidance and professional staff for Howard County. A similar program with related goals is also under development for the Anne Arundel County Maryland Public School System under Mr. Clarence Johnson.

At this point, the status can best be described as having made a very good start on an ambitious plan. The initial response to the program from counselors, students, parents, and other teaching and administrative professionals in the schools has been good. It is felt that the present structure of the program has adequate flexibility to adapt to changes in students' and system goals as necessary.

COMPETENCY BASED GUIDANCE

Competency-based guidance can be defined as a systematic method of delivering information and guidance services which is focused on helping all students become competent in knowledge, attitude, and skills. In practical terms, this implies development of systemwide goals and a list of defined competencies specific to each instructional level. The viewpoint expressed in this definition is fundamental. Individual counselors must define their role in terms of what students learn and not the functions they themselves perform. It assumes that students learn differently and, to insure that all students develop the defined competencies, different guidance methods must be used. It also assumes that individual counselors vary and that each has relative strengths and weaknesses in performing specific guidance functions. Hence, development of a team structure among guidance counselors assigned to individual schools is encouraged.

A second major element of the guidance program is its systems orientation. Guidance touches the full spectrum of student life. Many areas affected by guidance involve other individuals and groups who play vital roles in the students' development. The systems orientation tries to recognize and rationalize these factors by providing a common language, by developing methods for exchange of information, and by encouraging the student to develop a long-range plan for his/her personal and career development.

These elements make explicit another major viewpoint - responsibility is shared among school, parent, and student. Each has a role to play in helping students become competent in the various areas identified through the guidance process.

Figure 1 represents this systems view as a wheel. In the sections which follow I want to use this chart to highlight a few key aspects of the program.

The glossary is placed in the center of the figure. It is a set of definitions used as part of the guidance program. One function of the glossary is to provide a common language for all elements of the program and to facilitate communication between all of the parties; parents, students, and professional education staff. The glossary is open-ended and adaptable to change by adding new terms or modifying the definitions.

Program development started with a guidance philosophy shown at the top of Figure 1. The guidance philosophy developed for Howard County is shown in Figure 2. As written, it is consistent with the formal overall philosophy of education generally developed for the county school system. While all elements of the philosophy are important, I wish to call your attention to a few of the elements contained in the philosophy statement. First, notice that guidance services are to be available to all students, and competencies are expected of all students. Next, notice that responsibility for the guidance program is a shared responsibility involving school, guidance staff, parents, and the students themselves. The third important element designates the guidance counselor as the manager of the guidance program. A manager is a person who coordinates, who oversees and generally schedules, but need not control the direct delivery of guidance services. Finally, notice that the guidance philosophy assigns the responsibility for monitoring the achievement of competencies primarily to the parents and the students. This is consistent with the notion of shared responsibility. It requires an effective reporting and accounting system of student progress as the basis of this monitoring function. The student monitoring program appears as number 10 in the system diagram (Figure 1).

The third system element is the conceptual model for guidance. This is further illustrated in Figure 3. The conceptual model is a structure on which guidance competencies and guidance services can be organized. As shown, it varies by level and has within it the aspects of academic, career, and personal guidance. An additional aspect of the conceptual model of guidance is that it permits a consistent method of relating state mandates and programs to the county educational program. Note also that the conceptual model for guidance identifies a staff component as a separate item.

Figure 4 represents the current systemwide guidance goals for the Howard County School System and is identified as the fourth element in the overall system design for the program. These goals are intended to provide a framework for the development of specific school-based and student-based competency goals and plans. An example of a school-based list of student competencies developed for an individual high school in Howard County is shown in Figure 5. The list is a partial list of academic area competencies. Similar lists have been developed for each of the other three areas identified under the general conceptual model for guidance. These competencies are listed in a student planning and management folder developed for each student which also provides a record of student progress toward meeting the competency goals required. This folder is not just a record of what a student has done, however. It is a planning guide for the future. It is intended to be used along with other material obtained through the guidance program to help students develop personal goals and to plan an appropriate personal career plan. A few examples may help to indicate some of the specific material available.

The next two Figures are taken from a recently developed guidance handbook containing approximately 200 pages. I have selected from that handbook the Table of Contents listed in Figure 6 which indicates both information provided and examples of high school programs required for post high school academic programs or careers. It lists important information related to college planning and financial aid and includes a significant section which relates to trade and employment opportunities immediately following high school.

Figure 7 is the contents listing for one of the sub-headings under the general table of contents. Note in particular the information relating to high school subjects and careers. In addition, the planning portfolio describes the four-year educational plan which each student is encouraged to develop.

Guidance material is available for students through the guidance and career centers at each high school. These centers have a rich variety of print and non-print material. They are the places where individual and group meetings may be held on a variety of career and academic topics and provide a focus for a team-structured guidance system.

Under the general systems organization of the guidance program, three items (identified in Figure 1 as numbers 6, 7 and 8) can be generally viewed as part of the management and evaluation functions for the guidance program. These are critical because they specify the nuts and bolts of how the guidance program is implemented, who is responsible for managing the program at the school level, how overall tasks are assigned and how guidance counselors are evaluated. It also provides the mechanism for developing a team focus for the guidance program at each school level which is designed to use the strengths of individual members of the guidance team effectively.

The basic mechanism for implementing guidance programs occurs by negotiation between the counselor and the principal within the framework of the school competency lists and the county guidance philosophy and goals. The principal is the overall manager of the guidance system and is responsible for seeing that each student meets the list of required competencies.

Individual counselors negotiate each year with the principal a "counselor agreement" which specifies in detail the role that counselor will play within the overall school guidance program. The counselor is evaluated by the principal and by the guidance supervisory staff from the central administrative offices in terms of performance in relation to this agreement. The agreement must be specific and fairly detailed. It is expected, however, that the agreement will vary from school to school and from counselor to counselor recognizing different school populations and different strengths and weaknesses of individual counselors. The integration of the counselor agreements and required guidance tasks rests with the principal. As part of that management concept, the spoke number 8 labeled Needs Data is a mechanism for providing information back to central school administration regarding the operation of individual school-based guidance programs and assumes that changes may be required at a later time.

WHERE ARE WE?

At this time, most system functions present in Figure 1 are in place and functioning at least minimally. An exception is that systemwide and school-based advisory councils have not yet been formed. Career centers have been developed for each of the eight high schools. Significant progress has been made in developing initial competency lists and student management folders at middle school and high school levels.

The most critical issue has been the attitude of school-based administrators, faculty and guidance counselors. Their active support is essential and significant progress has been made in that area. There seems to be a sharp improvement in morale among school-based counselors in part because they have a context to frame the guidance program and additional attention and additional resources to carry out their tasks. There will be a continuing requirement for staff development over a period of years in order to familiarize counselors and administrators with the changed goals and methods used in the new program. At this point, however, the transition has gone quite smoothly and general acceptance seems to be present.

From the perspective of a Board of Education member, the systems model of guidance provides a number of significant advantages. It builds in evaluation at a variety of levels; it is flexible in scope; it can be adapted as the needs of the system change; and it builds in accountability because the program is framed in terms of things that can be measured. Finally, because the guidance program really can be viewed as a guidance process, it provides the opportunity for an entirely new attitude toward guidance with new tools and new opportunities for adapting and inter-relating guidance as an integral part of the overall academic program.

FIGURE 1

COMPETENCY-BASED GUIDANCE PROGRAM ELEMENTS

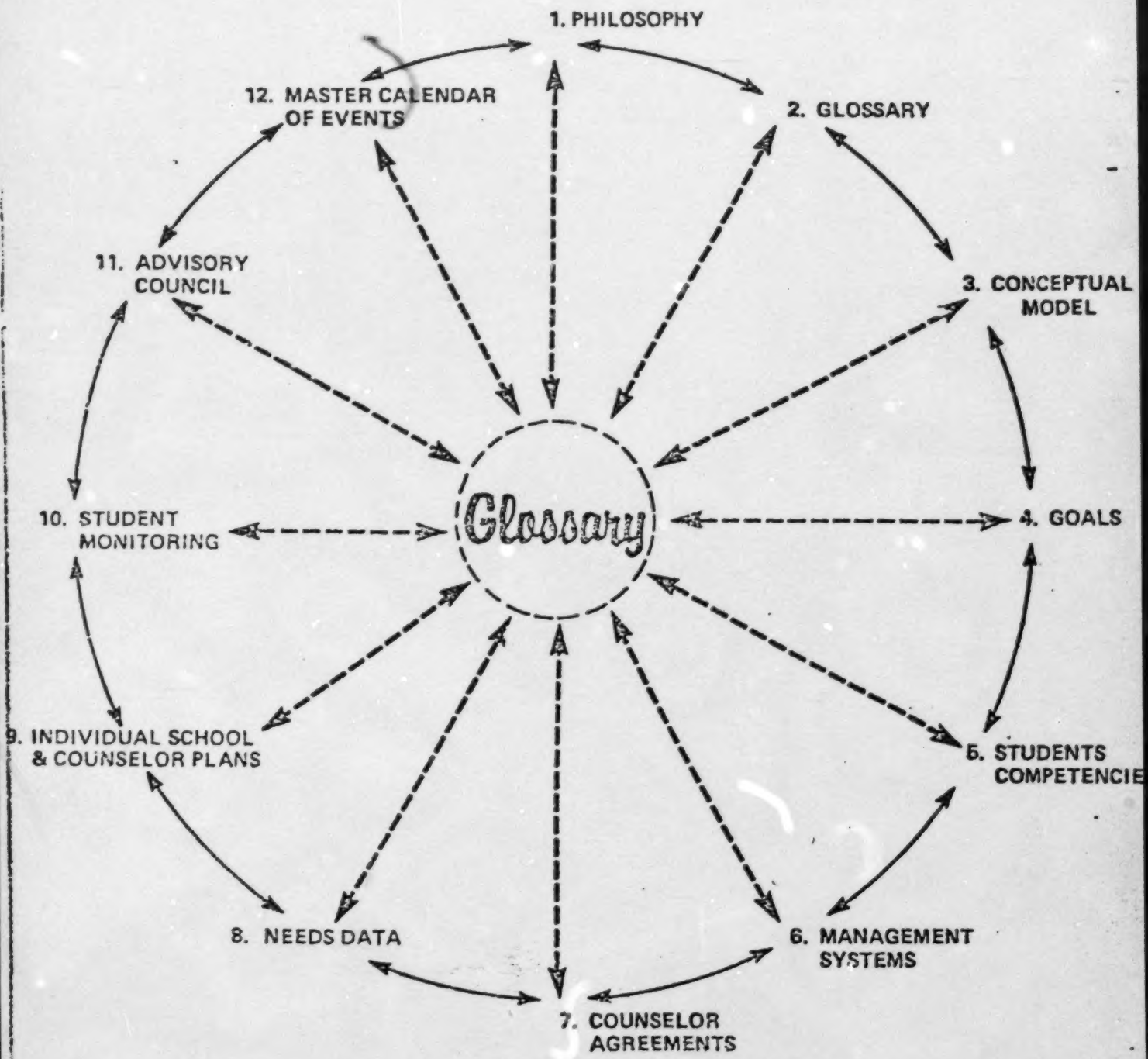

FIGURE 2

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS'

PHILOSOPHY OF GUIDANCE

The Counselors in Howard County Public Schools Believe That:

1. All students have the right to be served by the Guidance Program.
2. The Guidance Program should be based on stated goals and delineated student competencies.
3. The Guidance Program should be consistent with expected developmental stages of learning.
4. Guidance Program activities shall be planned and coordinated by the counseling staff.
5. Guidance Program activities should be implemented at each school by the counselors, administrators, teachers, students, other staff, parents and community members. (as appropriate)
6. Guidance Program should be managed by credentialled counselors.
7. Guidance Program managers shall present evidence of goal attainment at pre-specified intervals during the school year.
8. All students:
   - Should have access to a school staff member to discuss personal concerns.
   - Should have access to information about occupational and educational planning.
   - Have the right to assistance in identifying their self-characteristics.
   - Should have the opportunity to make choices within the constraints of the educational system.
9. Students and staff should be encouraged to recognize and appreciate the unique contributions, rights, responsibilities and esteem of self and others.
10. Guidance Program services shall be available to local community members as resources allow.
11. The student and parent are responsible for monitoring the student's educational progress with the assistance of school personnel.
12. An ongoing program of counselor competency renewal is necessary to maintain a quality Guidance Program.
13. The professional mandates and guidelines proposed by the American Personnel and Guidance Association shall constitute minimal standards for our guidance program.

FIGURE 3

Conceptual Model of Guidance

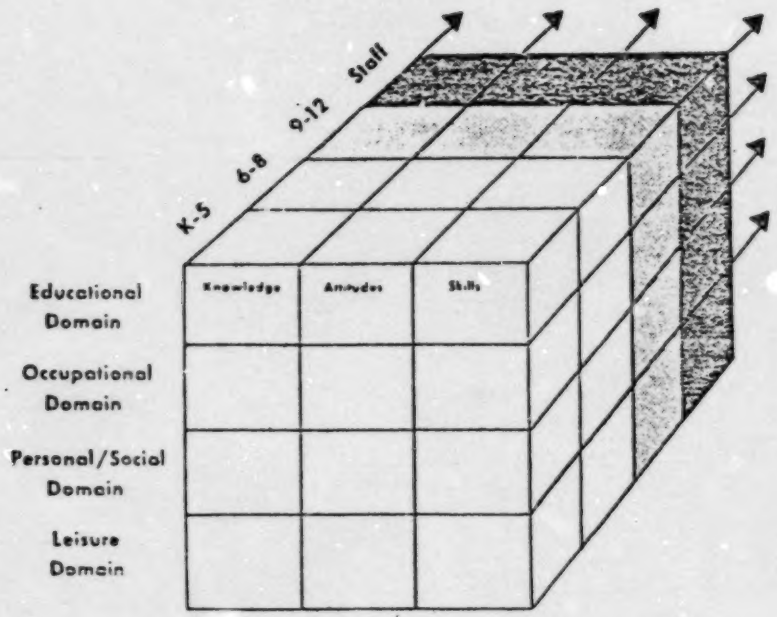

FIGURE 4

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

GUIDANCE GOALS

EDUCATIONAL DOMAIN

All students in the Howard County Public Schools will have the opportunity to develop an educational program that matches their self-characteristics.

Each student will acquire and demonstrate competencies in:

- Studying and test-taking
- Utilizing resources, exercising rights and responsibilities, and following rules and regulations
- Problem-solving and planning educational programs

CAREER/OCCUPATIONAL DOMAIN

All students in the Howard County Public Schools will have the opportunity to gain competencies needed to develop a process for life career planning.

Each student will acquire and demonstrate competencies in:

- Knowledge of self-characteristics
- Knowledge of the world of work
- Career decision-making and planning
- Finding and keeping employment

PERSONAL/SOCIAL DOMAIN

All students in the Howard County Public Schools will have the opportunity to develop effective human relationship skills that will enhance participation in all life roles including those of student, worker, family member and community member.

Each student will acquire and demonstrate competencies in:

- Effective interpersonal and human relationship skills
- Conflict resolution
- Communication with others
- Utilizing own and others' contributions

FIGURE 5

EDUCATIONAL Goals and Competencies

Each student at Wilde Lake High School will have access to available guidance resources and activities in developing an educational program that meets her/his goals and objectives in dealing with a changing society.

9th Grade

Each student will be able to:

1. Identify educational planning resources.
2. Identify course of study for post high school opportunities.
3. Identify required and elective courses available.
4. Describe current graduation requirements/registration procedures.
5. Describe current registration-advisor selection and orientation process.
6. Describe proficiency tests and required county tests, and their significance for program planning and graduation.

10th Grade

Each student will be able to:

1. Match educational planning resources with his/her academic and learning needs.
2. Enroll in a course of study that matches and enhances his/her educational goals and objectives.
3. Identify tests necessary for college admission.

11th Grade

Each student will be able to:

1. Identify application procedures/dates/tests necessary for college admissions.
2. Demonstrate educational planning skills.
3. Select an educational program that matches his/her post-high school plans.
4. Describe and evaluate his/her current and future program in relation to requirements for future educational progress, i.e., college requirements.

FIGURE 6

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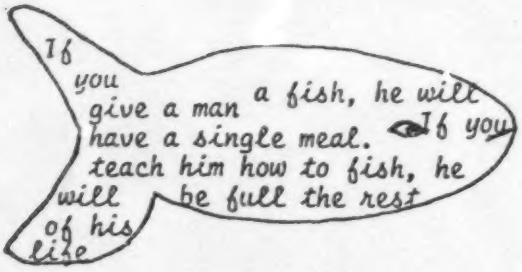

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